

# Corporate Chess<sup>SM</sup>

Master the Rules. Meet the Players. Play to Win.



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# Overview

- ▶ Why Corporate Chess<sup>SM</sup>?
- ▶ Master the Rules
- ▶ Meet the Players
- ▶ Play to Win
- ▶ Chess Problems
- ▶ Key Takeaways
- ▶ Wrap-Up/Q&A

# Why Corporate Chess<sup>SM</sup>?

- ▶ Chess is an excellent metaphor for corporate America because it requires
  - Strategy and patience
  - Using your mind; force won't work
  - Controlling crucial aspects of the game
  - Protecting your most valuable piece
  - Different colored pieces start on squares matching their color
  - Gamepieces and principles mirror corporate principles; moves are a combination of offense and defense
  - The game ends when the end result can no longer be avoided

# Master the Rules.

“A player surprised is half-beaten.”  
Chess Proverb



# The Chessboard

- ▶ Distance from locus of power
  - Power indicia: whiteness and maleness
- ▶ Living Room/Locker Room Syndrome<sup>(1)</sup>
  - No socially-accepted space for white men and multicultural women to interact
- ▶ This distance from power manifests itself in two major areas at work
  - Lack of Access
  - Racial and Gender Challenges

(1) Source: Kimberlé Crenshaw, quoted in "Women of Color: Why They Are Finding the Door Instead of the Glass Ceiling," *Perspectives* 15:1 (2006).

# Access Considerations



- ▶ Informal Networks
- ▶ Influential Sponsors and Mentors
- ▶ High-Visibility Assignments

Source: Catalyst, *Connections That Count: The Informal Networks of Women of Color in the United States* (2006), 2.



# Informal Networks

## ► Challenges

- Cultural miscues
- Unfamiliarity with the importance of informal networks
- “Blending in” vs. “Sticking together”<sup>(1)</sup>
- Disinterest in social relationships with colleagues
- Over-performance as a substitute for networks

(1) Catalyst, *Connections That Count: The Informal Networks of Women of Color in the United States* (2006), 17.



# Influential Sponsors & Mentors

## ► Challenges

- Cross-gender and cross-cultural concerns
- Misunderstanding of mentor and sponsor relationships
- Company mentoring programs/uncomfortable pairings
- Seeking only mentors who share ethnic heritage and gender



# High-Visibility Assignments

## ► Challenges

- Hypervisibility
- Separation of high-visibility assignments from other “access” issues
- Difficult relationships with managers
- Visibility-seeking

# Racial and Gender Challenges

“In the chess world, race, gender and class are invisible.”

The United States Chess Federation



# Racial and Gender Challenges

- ▶ Stereotypes
- ▶ Hypervisibility
- ▶ Status Incongruence
- ▶ Microaggressions



# Stereotypes

- ▶ Implicit assumptions and beliefs about MCW
  - Often unconscious, difficult to address
  - Results from information gaps
- ▶ Blake-Beard's "Deficit Model"<sup>(1)</sup>
  - MCW must "prove" their competence; others are given the benefit of the doubt
- ▶ "Taking Care" instead of "Taking Charge"<sup>(2)</sup>
  - MCW viewed as caretakers, not leaders
  - Socio-historical underpinnings

(1) Interview with Dr. Stacey Blake-Beard (2006-07).

(2) Catalyst, *Women "Take Care," Men "Take Charge:" Stereotyping of U.S. Business Leaders Exposed* (2005).

# Hypervisibility



- ▶ Heightened visibility experienced due to visible and/or cultural distinctions
- ▶ “Double Bind of Visibility”<sup>(1)</sup>
  - Excessive scrutiny around performance of MCW
  - Mistakes treated as proof of incompetence, not as developmental opportunities
- ▶ Different Expectations
  - Leadership traits<sup>(2)</sup>
  - Goals and aspirations

(1) Drs. Stacey Blake Beard and Laura Morgan Roberts, “Releasing the Double Bind of Visibility for Minorities in the Workplace”, CGO Commentaries 4 (Sep. 2004).

(2) Ancella Livers and Keith Caver. *Leading in Black and White* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003).

# Status Incongruence



- ▶ Where social power is incongruent with workplace power
  - Man who reports to a woman; MCM who reports to a MCW
  - Uncomfortable shifting of power balance
- ▶ Results in
  - Undermining of MCW's authority (very common)
  - Subjective attacks (not a "fit" or "can't put my finger on what is wrong")
  - Steering to "appropriate" roles (e.g., community relations, diversity)

# Microaggressions



Microaggressions are:

- ▶ “brief and commonplace daily verbal or behavioral indignities,
- ▶ whether intentional or unintentional,
- ▶ that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults
- ▶ and potentially have a harmful or unpleasant psychological impact on the target person or group”<sup>(1)</sup>

Source: Dr. Derald Wing Sue, as presented at the American Psychological Association Meeting (2003).

# Microaggressions I



- ▶ Alien in your own land<sup>(1)</sup>
  - A colleague asks an Asian-American woman, “Where are you from?”
- ▶ Ascription of Intelligence<sup>(1)</sup>
  - A surprised colleague says to a Latina: “You’re so articulate!”
- ▶ Color Blindness<sup>(1)</sup>
  - A co-worker says to a Native American woman, “You don’t really *look* like a Native American”
  - Another confides in an African-American woman, “I don’t really see you as a Black person”

(1) Dr. Derald Wing Sue, et al., *American Psychologist* 4 (May-June 2007): 282-83.

# Microaggressions II



- ▶ Denial of Differences<sup>(1)</sup>
  - A co-worker says to a group of friends, “All Asians look alike.”
- ▶ Guilty Until Proven Innocent<sup>(1)</sup>
  - A Black Latina is followed around Saks Fifth Avenue as she shops for an evening gown for an upcoming formal dinner.
- ▶ Invalidation of Racial Reality<sup>(1)</sup>
  - A manager says to a fair-skinned African-American employee: “You won’t have as difficult a time at this company as other Blacks because your skin is lighter.”

(1) Dr. Derald Wing Sue, et al., *American Psychologist* 4 (May-June 2007): 282-83.

# Microaggressions III



- ▶ Myth of Meritocracy <sup>(1)</sup>
  - A co-worker says to an Asian-American colleague, "This company is a meritocracy. The cream always rises to the top."
- ▶ Second Class Citizen <sup>(1)</sup>
  - A Latina Managing Director visits the MD's dining room for lunch with a colleague without a reservation, and is given a table in the back of the room. Then a Caucasian male MD says loudly upon entering the dining room "I didn't make a reservation, but could I get a table?" "Of course," responds the server, and she promptly shows him to a reserved table, "We've had a cancellation," she explains.
- ▶ Woman of Service (New!)
  - An African-American woman who is a division head travels abroad with Caucasian male employees in her group. When she enters the meeting, she is asked to serve coffee to the group, despite being the most senior person in the room.

(1) Dr. Derald Wing Sue, et al., *American Psychologist* 4 (May-June 2007): 282-83.

# Meet The Players.

“Once the game is over, the king and the pawn go back into the same box.”

Chess Proverb

# I.D. the Players



- ▶ A critical part of chess is understanding the gamepieces
- ▶ Each piece has a scope of movement that impacts its effectiveness
- ▶ Certain pieces are pawns (i.e., expendable)
- ▶ Some pieces have “multiple lives”

# Corporate Players I



- ▶ Your Boss (the “Queen”)
  - Broad range of motion
  - Can protect and attack from a variety of angles
- ▶ A Prominent Sponsor (the “King”)
  - Limited range of motion
  - Crucial to achieving victory
  - His or her demise directly affects your viability
- ▶ Your Mentor (the “Bishop”)
  - Gives you advice in challenging situations
  - Has access to inside or hidden information
  - Can move to protect, but more limited than the Queen

# Corporate Players II



- ▶ Well-connected colleagues (the “Knights”)
  - They can help you in a challenging situation
  - But, beware: these pieces change direction when they move and can jump over other pieces
- ▶ Allies at work (the “Rooks”)
  - Have limited and sweeping movement that works best in conjunction with another Rook
- ▶ Anyone (the “Pawn”)
  - May be sacrificed, but not always
  - Initially makes significant moves, but is later limited
  - Can promote to any piece, often the most powerful one!

# Which Piece are You?



- ▶ This is not Monopoly
  - No car, shoe, or dog pieces!
- ▶ You are the chess player in your own game
  - The pieces are part of your arsenal
  - Stay focused on strategy
- ▶ In others' games, you are a gamepiece
  - Avoid being a pawn at all costs (even if you think you're about to "promote")

# Almost There...

- ▶ You now have a basic understanding of the “chessboard,” or the corporate context
- ▶ Also, you have “met the players” and can identify people crucial to your success
- ▶ Now it’s time to develop actionable strategies—a “game plan” you can use at work

Playing to Win.

“Threats are harder to see than captures. Some moves threaten checkmate, some threaten captures, some involve a general improvement in position. Some threats are crude, brutal, obvious. Others are unbelievably subtle in their intentions, refined in their execution.”

Fred Reinfeld  
American Chess Player  
(1910-1964)

# Rule Basics



- ▶ The “rules” already exist
  - Origin of rules is often historical; sometimes unknown; almost always cultural
- ▶ The rules change very slowly (if at all)
  - Think: “Business attire” to “Business Casual”
- ▶ You don’t make or change the rules
  - Beware of your internal “rule book”
- ▶ Some form of the rules applies to everyone

# Mastering the Rules



- ▶ There are multiple sets of “unwritten rules”
  - Same behavior elicits different response
  - Look for role models to find out what applies to you
- ▶ You can stay within the rules with **flair**
  - Think fashion: play with color and accessories
- ▶ Your internal “rule book” won’t necessarily work when applied to others
- ▶ Some rules can be broken; others cannot
  - Multiplicity of factors involved

# Gamesmanship vs. Sportsmanship



## ▶ Sportsmanship<sup>(1)</sup>

- Defined as: “conduct becoming to one participating in a sport, such as fairness, respect for one’s opponent, and graciousness in winning or losing”

## ▶ Gamesmanship<sup>(1)</sup>

- Defined as: “the art or practice of winning games by questionable expedients without actually violating the rules” or
- “the use of ethically dubious methods to gain an objective”

▶ Are you are a sportswoman or a gameswoman?

▶ What about your colleagues?

(1) *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, Tenth Edition (2001).

# Winning Strategies



## ► Access Challenges

- Close the gap
  - ▶ Build bridges to form relationships (try not to burn or napalm them)
  - ▶ Find commonalities with others
  - ▶ Avoid trying to “pre-empt” rejection
  - ▶ Be ready to educate others about “Me Inc.”<sup>(1)</sup>
- Be on the lookout for relationships
  - ▶ Some develop naturally with senior leaders
  - ▶ Leverage internal programs to make cross-functional connections
- Check your performance
  - ▶ If it’s not up to par, work to excel
  - ▶ If it’s excellent, volunteer for assignments that will broaden your internal exposure

(1) Ronna Lichtenberg, *Pitch Like A Girl* (New York: Rodale, Inc.), 95.

# Winning Strategies



- ▶ Racial and Gender Challenges
  - Use knowledge as an ally
    - ▶ Selectively share information about yourself
    - ▶ Know that stereotypes are “out there”
  - Be gracious in dealing with gaffes
  - Develop a tempered-visibility approach
    - ▶ Be careful of seeking visibility
    - ▶ Timing is everything
  - Establish your authority with all-around excellence
    - ▶ Subtle expressions can be useful
    - ▶ Use attention deficits strategically
    - ▶ Reference similar models, as available

# Chess Problems

# Chess Problem No. 1

Cindy, a 42-year-old Caucasian executive and Seeta, a 40-year-old South Asian executive each head up revenue-generating divisions of a well-known consumer products company. The company recently announced that Cindy would take on a new product launch which would generate significant revenue for the company, and Seeta would take on a “turn around project”—helping an underperforming division get back on track—another revenue-generating project for the company.

This is Seeta’s second turn-around project. You and Seeta went to business school together and have been friends for some time.

1. How do you view these two announcements?
2. What messages do you think the company is sending Cindy and Seeta?
3. What are Seeta’s options for dealing with this scenario?
4. How would you respond if you were Seeta?

# Chess Problem No. 2

Lisa, 29, is the associate director of human resources for a global diversified manufacturing company. Lisa and four other managers and directors are invited to sit on a panel for an Employee Network Event to discuss "Keys to Success" in the organization. Her remarks are focused on performance, building relationships, and taking time to build a life outside of the office.

During the Q&A, one employee asks Lisa a loaded question: "Do you think that people who belong to Group X have it easier at the company than people who are in Group Y?" You are a participant at the event.

1. Who is included in Groups X and Y in your culture? What sort of intra-racial challenges exist within your cultural contexts?
2. What microaggressions, access, or other issues do you see?
3. How do you think Lisa should answer that question? Why?

**Bonus:** What do you think of the topic of the Employee Network Event?

# Key Takeaways

- ▶ Know your environment
- ▶ Be prepared for, not surprised by, access, racial, and gender challenges
- ▶ Get started building bridges with others through networking and educating others about “Me Inc.”
- ▶ Self-disclose strategically and truthfully
- ▶ Use mentors to help you gain perspective and sponsors to champion your cause; look for natural relationships
- ▶ Take time to think and strategize about your career; chess is not a game in which you stumble upon victory, it’s a game you plan to win
- ▶ Play to WIN!

# Q&A

# Thank You.

<http://www.women-suite.com>

